

Message Text

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SUBJECT: PRESS MATERIAL

1. HERewith WASHPOST MARCH 1 LOCAL BYLINES BY MICHEAL GETLER, HEADED MIRVS SEEN CENTRAL TO SALT TALKS:
2. PROSPECTS FOR REACHING AGREEMENT WITH THE SOVIET UNION LATER THIS YEAR ON A FURTHER LIMITATION OF NUCLEAR ARMS ARE SAID TO CENTER ON AN AGREEMENT TO LIMIT DEPLOYMENT OF MISSILES CARRYING THE HIGHLY ACCURATE TYPE OF MULTIPLE WARHEADS KNOWN AS MIRVS.
3. U.S. NEGOTIATORS AT THE RECENTLY RESUMED STRATEGIC ARMS LIMITATION TALKS (SALT) IN GENEVA ARE SAID TO BE OUTLINING A PROPOSED LIMITATION ON THE NUMBER AND TYPE OF MISSILES IN EACH COUNTRY'S ARSENAL THAT CAN CARRY THESE WEAPONS.
4. THOUGH DETAILS ARE BEING TIGHTLY HELD, INDICATIONS ARE UNCLASSIFIED

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THAT THE UNITED STATES WILL URGE THE SOVIET UNION SPECIFICALLY

TO LIMIT DEPLOYMENT OF MIRV CARRIERS TO THEIR SMALLER MISSILES RATHER THAN TO A MUCH LARGER TYPE OF WEAPON FOR WHICH THERE IS NO U.S. COUNTERPART.

5. ADMINISTRATION SOURCES RATE THE CHANCES FOR SOME SORT OF AGREEMENT ON MIRV BY A SUMMER OR FALL SUMMIT MEETING AS GENERALLY GOOD, THOUGH NOT CERTAIN, THEY BELIEVE SUCH AN AGREEMENT WOULD ESSENTIALLY AUGMENT A PORTION OF THE INITIAL ARMS PACT OF MAY 1972, LEAVING THE MUCH MORE MASSIVE PROBLEMS OF ACHIEVING A PERMANENT AGREEMENT COVERING ALL SORTS OF STRATEGIC WEAPONS FOR A LATER DATE.

6. MIRV WHICH STANDS FOR MULTIPLE INDEPENDENTLY TARGETED RE-ENTRY VEHICLE, IS THE TECHNIQUE OF PUTTING SEVERAL NUCLEAR WARHEADS ON A SINGLE MISSILE AND SENDING EACH TO A DIFFERENT TARGET. IT IS A TECHNIQUE THAT IS AT THE HEART OF THE ARMS RACE, AND ONE IN WHICH THE UNITED STATES HAS MAINTAINED A SIZABLE LEAD. THE SOVIET UNION, HOWEVER, WITH LARGER MISSILES, IS TESTING MIRV SYSTEMS, AND COULD SEVERAL YEARS FROM NOW CATCH UP WITH THE UNITED STATES.

7. THE UNITED STATES, WITHIN THE NEXT YEAR OR TWO, WILL COMPLETE THE OUTFITTING OF 550 MINUTEMAN III AND 496 SUBMARINE-LAUNCHED POSEIDON MISSILES WITH THESE WEAPONS. MOST U.S. OFFICIALS BELIEVE THE SOVIET UNION WILL NOT SETTLE FOR FEWER MIRV MISSILES THAN THE UNITED STATES HAS. THOUGH THERE IS NO OFFICIAL INDICATION OF THIS, IF THERE IS AN AGREEMENT IT MAY NOT REDUCE THE OVERALL ARMS LEVEL BUT MAY PREVENT THEIR GROWING MUCH LARGER.

8. IT IS ALSO SUGGESTED THAT THE ACHIEVEMENT OF AN AGREEMENT TO LIMIT DEPLOYMENT OF MIRVS WILL TAKE PLACE WITHIN SOME GENERAL AGREEMENT ON THE AGGREGATE NUMBER OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS OF ALL TYPES--INCLUDING BOMBERS.

9. THIS IS A KEY POINT OF CONTROVERSY WITHIN CONGRESS AND IS THE SOURCE OF SOME DIFFERENCE WITHIN THE ADMINISTRATION.

10. THE SOVIET UNION, UNDER THE INITIAL SALT AGREEMENTS OF 1972, IS ALLOWED A LARGER NUMBER OF LAND-AND SEA-BASED

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MISSILES THAN IS THE UNITED STATES. AT THE TIME, THE LARGE U.S. LEAD IN QUALITY OF WEAPONS AND IN MIRV, WAS VIEWED AS A COMPENSATING FACTOR.

11. BUT THE INITIAL AGREEMENTS DID NOT INCLUDE BOMBERS, WEAPONS WHICH CARRY A CONSIDERABLE LOAD OF NUCLEAR BOMBS AND WHERE THE UNITED STATES MAINTAINS A SIZABLE NUMERICAL LEAD.

12. SIMILARLY, THOUGH THE SOVIET UNION IS ALLOWED A LARGER NUMBER OF WEAPONS, IT HAS NOT BUILT UP TO THOSE LEVELS.

13. FOR EXAMPLE, THE SOVIET UNION STILL HAS ABOUT 91 NEW ICBM SILOS THAT ARE NOT FILLED. AND, THOUGH IT IS ALLOWED 950 SUBMARINE-LAUNCHED MISSILES, THE SOVIET UNION PRESENTLY HAS SOMETHING IN EXCESS OF 600. THUS, IT IS REASONABLE THAT AT THE PRESENT TIME--WHEN BOMBER FORCES ARE COUNTED--BOTH COUNTRIES ARE NOT FAR APART IN THE NUMBER OF NUCLEAR WEAPON DELIVERY VEHICLES ON EACH SIDE--ABOUT 2,200 LAND AND SUBMARINE-BASED MISSILES AND BOMBERS.

14. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS, IN THE VIEW OF SOME OFFICIALS, IS THAT THE FRAMEWORK EXISTS FOR A MIRV AGREEMENT AT A TIME WHEN NEITHER SIDE HAS ANY CLEAR UNILATERAL ADVANTAGE OVER THE OTHER.

15. IN ADDITION TO THE QUESTION OF THE NUMBER OF MISSILES, THERE IS THE IMPORTANT RELATED QUESTION OF HOW TO DEAL WITH THE GREATER LIFTING POWER OF THE SOVIET MISSILES. THIS DETERMINES HOW MANY WARHEADS CAN BE CARRIED BY A MISSILE. IT IS NOT CLEAR AT THIS POINT WHETHER THIS VERY TOUCHY AND COMPLEX ASPECT WILL BE DEALT WITH THIS YEAR.

16. THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT U.S. NEGOTIATORS MAY WORK TOWARD A MIDDLE GROUND BETWEEN WHAT THE SOVIET UNION IS ALLOWED UNDER THE TREATY AND WHAT THE UNITED STATES ALREADY HAS. THUS THE SOVIETS WOULD REDUCE THEIR FORCES SOMEWHAT WHILE THE UNITED STATES WOULD APPEAR TO BE ALLOWED TO BUILD UP TOWARD THAT MIDDLE FIGURE.

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17. HOWEVER, OFFICIALS NOTE THAT FUTURE U.S. FORCE LEVELS TEND TO BE UNDERESTIMATED, SINCE THE UNITED STATES WOULD RETAIN THE OPTION--AS NEW BOMBERS AND SUBMARINES ARE PRODUCED--TO RETIRE EXISTING B-52 BOMBERS AND OLDER POLARIS-FRING SUBMARINES. THUS THE UNITED STATES FIVE YEARS FROM NOW COULD ALLOW ITS FORCES TO INCREASE IF NECESSARY TO THE HIGHER LEVEL BY RETAINING SOME OF THE OLDER WEAPONS IN SERVICE.

18. BY LIMITING DEPLOYMENT OF MIRV TO THE LIGHTER CLASS OF SOVIET MISSILES, THIS WOULD BE A STEP TOWARD HANDLING THE PROBLEM OF GREATER SOVIET LIFTING POWER- THE SOVIETS NOW HAVE ABOUT 1,000 OF THESE LIGHT SS-11 MISSILES, WHICH ARE ROUGHLY THE SAME SIZE AS THE 1,000 U.S. MINUTEMAN MISSILES. THE SOVIETS ARE TESTING TWO NEW MIRV MISSILES AS

POSSIBLE SUCCESSORS TO THE SS-11. THESE ARE THE SS-17
AND -19. SOME US EXPERTS BELIEVE THE SS-19 WILL BE THE
WEAPON CHOSEN. IT REPORTEDLY HAS HAD VERY SUCCESSFUL TEST
FLIGHTS.

19. THE SOVIETS ALSO HAVE 288 VERY LARGE SS-19 MISSILES,
AND ARE TESTING A POTENTIAL MIRV REPLACEMENT KNOWN AS THE
SS-18.

20. THESE ARE INDICATIONS THAT THE UNITED STATES WILL
PRESS TO PREVENT REPLACEMENT OF THESE LARGE MISSILES, OR
PERHAPS LIMIT DEPLOYMENT OF THE SS-18 TO SOME 25 NEW
SILOS THAT WERE STARTED BEFORE THE INITIAL SALT AGREEMENT.

21. THE GENERAL INTENT IS TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF MISSILES,
WARHEADS AND EXPLOSIVE POWER THAT HAVE THE RIGHT COMBINA-
TION TO THREATEN KNOCKING OUT LAND-BASED U.S. MISSILES
IN A SURPRISE ATTACK,

22. THE DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES LAID OUT BY PRESIDENT
NIXON AND COMMUNIST PARTY CHIEF LEONID BREZHNEV LAST SUM-
MER INCLUDES PLEDGES TO
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